

Jesus is Always Ready to Listen

28 October 2018

- Having the Courage to Bring our Deepest Needs to Jesus

Reading: Mark 10:46-52

The good news is that Jesus is always ready to listen to our requests, whatever they might be. I heard of one woman whose deepest desire was to win Lotto. Every week she got down on her knees and prayed hard especially on a Wednesday and a Saturday night. Expressing her deepest desire to God she would pray, “O Lord, let me win Lotto.” But it didn’t seem to make any difference. Then one night when she was praying a huge voice boomed out, “Meet me halfway, buy a ticket!”

Today’s gospel story shows us a person having the courage to bring their deepest desires to God. Jesus is on his last stop before Jerusalem and the events that lead to his death. But first, like all pilgrims, he must go to Jericho. The steep desert road will lead him and the other pilgrims to where the capital stands. Unlike the other pilgrims, Jesus is at the head of a large group and they look up to him. A bit like the group of refugees moving up to Mexico at the moment, they would have been a poor, ragtag, sort of bunch. They were all going to the Passover and were anxious to get there. The disciples in particular don’t want to be stopped by a man calling out, especially not a blind man. In rough tones they tell him to be quiet. Despite the crowd, Jesus hears his cry and he orders them to bring him over.

Some very beautiful things are happening in our Gospel. Like me you must have read it numerous times and yet I’ve missed these lovely things all these years.

First, Mark the gospel writer gives the blind man a name. To the disciples he is just another blind man, but to Jesus he has a name and a very fine one: Bartimaeus. Usually the poor go unnamed but for Jesus he is named and valued

and loved. The way Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus is packed with significance.

“Son of David” he calls. To call Jesus son of David on his way to the city of David is to name him king. This is a subversive act when only the emperor is king. Then the most tender moment of all. “What can I do for you?” Jesus asks. You can almost hear the disciples saying, “For goodness sake the man’s blind, get on and heal him.” But Jesus doesn’t assume he knows what Bartimaeus wants. He waits on his request. He holds the whole cavalcade up while he listens. And then he heals. It’s as if part of the healing is to have the man name his need.

The good news of today’s reading is that Jesus is always ready to listen. Nothing is going to deter Jesus from listening to Bartimaeus and nothing is going to deter Jesus from listening to you - no crowd, no empire, no anxious followers. Your request is what matters to Jesus and he is waiting to hear it.

Sometimes we hold back. After all to ask for something is to admit our need of help, our vulnerability. Maybe we fear rejection. But remember Jesus words, “Come to me all you who are heavy burdened and I will make your burdens light again.” Blind Bartimaeus sees that Jesus is always ready to listen. We who find it so hard to be vulnerable can learn so much from Bartimaeus.

To laugh, is to risk appearing a fool.

To weep, is to risk appearing weak.

To reach out, to another is to risk involvement.

To expose your feelings, is to risk exposing your true self.

To place your dreams, your ideals before the crowd is to risk ridicule.

To love is to risk rejection.

To hope is to risk despair.

To try is to risk failure.

To live is to risk dying.

But wait, there's more! The good news gets even better. Even before we ask, God's love is reaching out to us. Even before there is a word on your tongue, we read in the psalms, He knows it through and through.

Let me tell you just one story of God's love reaching out. Three bored young lads thought they would play a trick on the local vicar. They got together and devised a cunning plan. They would take it in turns to go to confession and confess the most terrible crimes and see how he would react, after all, they said, he can't tell anyone. Two of them did it and ran off giggling but the priest stopped the third one and announced he was going to impose a penance on him. The lad was walked up to the far end of the church toward the figure of Jesus hanging on cross. He was to look Jesus in the face and to say three times, "You did all that for me, and I don't give that much." and to snap his fingers on the that. The young man did it once, he did it a second time, but he found he couldn't do it a third time. Instead he dissolved into tears. He left that church a changed person. And the reason I know this story, is that that boy is now an archbishop.

Bartimeus knew the call of God on his life that day. He knew that Jesus would listen to his request and that nothing stood in the way of him having an audience with the king. I think it's likely that Bartimaeus was known to Mark the gospel writer because of what follows. The seeing Bartimaeus continues "on the way." The way is what the first Christians called Christianity. In other words Bartimaeus becomes a disciple.

What is your deepest need? What is it that it takes courage for you to name before God?

Rest assured, like Bartimaeus, Jesus is tenderly waiting on your request. He doesn't force, he doesn't push, but he does listen. And part of the healing comes in the naming, having the courage to bring before God our deepest need. For only then can we see God answer us.

Today's gospel is filled with irony. It is the blind man who can see Jesus for who he really is. It is the voiceless nameless poor man who has a name and names Jesus as king. It is the powerless one who Jesus affirms as having faith. It is the rejected one of society who finds true community with Jesus.

May we have the courage to bring our deepest needs to Jesus.